

HOOFBEAT NEWS

IN THIS ISSUE:

Trouble-Free Trailering

Page 3

Preparing For the Show Season

Page 6

Kids Pull-Out Magazine

Page 8



Kathy Fremes and her horse Josh

Finding The Balance

Kristyn Hale

As the owner, manager and coach of Country Hill Farm near Stouffville, Ontario Kathy Fremes has her hands full. Days start early and end late at Country Hill, with an endless to-do list full of training in the morning, errands in the afternoon and teaching in the evening.

Fremes splits her time between being a chair of the Ontario Horse Facility Advisory Council of the OEF (Ontario Equestrian Federation) and sits on the executive of the same association as its secretary, and runs her own 25-horse stable, teaching 30 students, training horses, and looking after 30 rolling acres of farmland and another 30 of hay fields. In addition she launched Country Hill Cooks!--a school that celebrates locally produced foods and wine. Finally there is the popular Country Hill Retreats business that offers farm vacations to city types who want to hone their riding skills and experience farm living if only for a day or two. Oh and did I mention, she still continues her writing-editorial business, "But I concentrate mostly on subjects that relate to the business of running and managing horse farms."

When asked what a typical day involves, Fremes laughs and replies "Coffee first!" In a day as busy as hers, it would be hard not to drink coffee! Fremes began riding at an early age and started teaching when she was 17 to "support her horsey habit." She didn't start off with a horse of her own at the time, but rode and trained horses for others. She fondly recalls one of these first horses, a small pinto mare no taller than herself named Squeeze. She remembers clearly how Squeeze would follow her around, and the many things they did together, including mock hunts. To this day she still has pictures of Squeeze in her home.

Since then the equine industry has changed drastically. "Country Hill used to be way out in the sticks; now it's one of the closest stables from metro Toronto!" Urbanization is not the only change in the industry, the demographics are changing as well. Riding used to be primarily a child's sport. Parents would take their kids up to the barn to ride with others kids, the parents themselves never rode.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1



Entrance to Country Hill Farm



Fremes Coaching the Author

But now there has been a shift in the business. Adults are beginning to ride for the first time, or picking up riding again from their childhood. Many are even purchasing their first horse and fulfilling a life-long dream. Looking at Country Hill as a business Fremes is aware of this and makes changes accordingly. Especially since "About half of my students now are adults."

Next to horses, food has been a life long passion with Fremes and cooking is how she unwinds. About six years ago she and a riding student who helped to launch the successful 'Dish' cooking school in Toronto joined forces and did a spin off cooking school from the farmhouse. This student went on to Ottawa where she runs another cooking facility out of an old firehall, leaving Fremes to continue solo.

'Country Hill Cooks!' classes rely on using fresh and organic ingredients from local purveyors or even Fremes' own garden, taking into careful account the season and what ingredients are available locally...think 100 mile diet. Fremes has multiple contacts in the neighbourhood, and runs her classes with a "farm to fork" mentality. The hands-on classes strive to get people away from a fast-food culture and into the wholesome world of 'slow-food'. When asked what she enjoys most out of her many jobs she responded wisely: "Do what you love and you never have to work a day in your life." Through her cooking Fremes gets instant gratification and results. When working with horses, the process takes far longer, sometimes even years, to reap the rewards. But it is well worth it, "being able to connect with horses and students to come through to a breakthrough

moment." And working with the OEF is way to "give back" and educating the next generation to follow. "I believe in community service, and that just doesn't mean pulling out a chequebook but giving of your time and experience," she says.

Being a student of Fremes' myself, I can attest to this. It has been an interesting ride in re-training the horse that I lease, and I know I could not have done it without her input. She has a wealth of information and for every problem I have ever come across in my riding, she has had a solution. Since coming to Country Hill about a year ago my riding has improved immensely, and it's all because of Fremes.

In order to keep up with all the many things that she does, Fremes stresses the importance of finding a balance. Managing the farm is a huge responsibility not to be taken lightly. People depend on Fremes to be there and provide for their horses. "In this business, the job is 90 per cent hard work and I'm very lucky to have an excellent staff to support me and care about these horses and students as if they were their own."

But for every day her staff take off--including major holidays--Fremes must be there to fill in "and horses don't care if its Christmas or you've got a really bad cold...they just want to be fed." Her greatest challenge is to balancing her life. "The farm can become a vortex, the horses can become a vortex. In a way it's like having a child, you can't just get up and walk away from it."

"I'm a great believer in whatever you put into a pursuit, you get out of it. Country Hill has been a wonderful, wild and sometimes bumpy 20 year ride, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

